

## **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE –**

**Patricia A. Ford/ April 23, 2004**

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, I AM GLAD TO JOIN YOU AT THIS INTERNATIONAL LABOR LEADERS' BREAKFAST. I THINK IT IS A VITALLY IMPORTANT QUESTION TO RAISE: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE AS WE WORK TO ORGANIZE AND BUILD A STRONGER PRO-LABOR, PRO-JUSTICE MOVEMENT?

WE NEED TO LOOK AT THE SOUTH, A REGION THAT HAS BEEN LARGELY OVERLOOKED AND UNTAPPED AS A RESEVOIR OF STRENGTH AND POWER. AS AN AFRICAN AMERICAN, I ESPECIALLY UNDERSTAND THAT THE SOUTH IS WHERE THE MAJORITY OF OUR PEOPLE RESIDE.

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SOUTH IS ALSO CHANGING. THERE HAS BEEN A RE-MIGRATION TO THE SOUTH OF MANY PEOPLE WHO ARE EITHER RETIRING OR SEEKING A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE. IT'S IN THE INTEREST OF THOSE IN THE NORTHEAST AND MIDWEST AND WEST TO SURE UP THE SOUTH. IF WE CAN MAKE CERTAIN THAT PEOPLE HAVE A LIVING WAGE AND THAT WORKER'S RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED IN THE SOUTH, WE CAN BUILD MOMENTUM THAT MOVES NATIONWIDE.

LET'S USE MISSISSIPPI AS AN EXAMPLE. WE WORED THERE TO BUILD A POLLITICAL MOVEMENT. ALTHOUGH WE WERE NOT SUCCEESSFUL IN THE GOVERNOR'S RACE, WE GAINED A GREAT DEAL IN OUR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING. BY MAINTAINING THOSE RELATIONSHIPS WE HAVE TESTED AND EXPANDED OUR ORGANIZING STRENGTH.

WE HAVE CONNECED WORKERS IN THE PLANTS WITH PEOPLE ON THE STREETS. CONTRARY TO THE NOTIONS OF NAYSAYERS, THE SOUTH CAN BE ORGANIZED.

BUT WE ARE CHALLENGED TO BE SMARTER, BOLDER AND MORE CREATIVE. BECAUSE WE FACE RIGHT TO WORK OBSTACLES – WE CERTAINLY LACK ACCESS TO WORKERS. BUT THIS MEANS, WE FIND OTHER AVENUES. WE BUILD ALLIANCES. WE WORK THE LOCAL POLITICS. AND WE CULTIVATE ONE-ON-ONE RELATIONSHIPS.

IN FACT, RELATIONSHIPS BECOME MORE IMPORTANT ACROSS THE BOARD: CONNECTIONS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS; WITH MINISTERS, WITH THE PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT OBVIOUS LEADERS, BUT THEY ARE THE GRASSROOTS MOVERS AND DOERS.

MY MESSAGE TO YOU IS TO BUILD AND SUSTAIN  
COMMUNITY ALLIANCES. WE CANNOT EXPECT  
COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT US IF WE HAVE NOT LAID  
THE GROUND AND BUILT THE BRIDGES TO BE PART OF  
THE COMMUNITY. PEOPLE NEED TO BELIEVE THAT WE  
GENERALLY CARE. IT DOESN'T TAKE A LOT OF  
MATERIAL RESOURCES TO DO THIS. BUT IT TAKES THE  
TWO MOST VALUABLE RESOURCE WE AS ORGANIZERS  
HAVE – TIME AND EXPERIENCE.

I END BY REMINDING ALL OF US THAT BEING A  
UNION MEMBER IS NOT JUST ABOUT A FATTER  
PAYCHECK. IT'S ABOUT BEING PART OF A  
MOVEMENT THAT BELIEVES IN THE WORTH AND  
DIGNITY OF EVERY HUMAN BEING.

SO LET'S GET BUSY PROVING THAT WE IN THE  
TADE UNION MOVEMENT ARE OUR BROTHERS  
AND SISTERS KEEPERS!